

# Success In Columbus — A Short Course Recap

The OFA Short Course attracts growers and suppliers from around the world. Check out what attendees learned on the show floor and the innovative ideas they took home to implement in their own businesses.

By Jasmina Radjevic

Approximately 10,000 floriculture professionals met in Columbus, Ohio, in July for the annual OFA Short Course, sponsored by OFA — an Association of Floriculture Professionals. The theme was “Learn, Grow and Be Inspired,” and this year’s show was nothing short of inspirational. Attendees from across the United States and nearly 30 other countries conducted business on the 1,440-booth trade show floor, learned new skills in 135 seminars, networked with peers and gained a perspective on current industry issues.

No matter what segment of the industry, all attendees had a variety of educational and networking events from which to choose. It was a venue to discover new trends, discuss industry issues with peers, learn from academics, mingle with old friends and even build new relationships. The *GPN* crew returned from Columbus overflowing with information and ideas!

## Continuing Education

Education is always a strong focus of the annual Short Course, and this year was no exception. One new introduction, the OFA Scholars Program, was open to undergraduate and graduate students studying floriculture. Students were chosen through an application process and then were given the opportunity to attend the event and gain exposure to various aspects of the industry.

Applications for the 2008 Scholars Program will be accepted until Jan. 15, 2008. This is a great opportunity for students interested in pursuing a career in floriculture. OFA Scholars receive complimentary meals, lodging and full OFA Short Course registration, as well as a complimentary 1-year OFA associate membership.

Another opportunity for growers interested in improving their knowledge and skills in crop production was the Floriculture College of Knowledge, which took place on Friday and Saturday before the trade show exhibits opened. This

Michigan State University program included classes on Root Zone Management, Bedding Plant Production, Greenhouse Insect Management and Growth Regulators. Participants from all types of growing operations were enthusiastic about attending the informative sessions. Some were even kind enough to stop and chat with us between sessions, and it was obvious from the abundance of text books and notes they were carrying that they were gaining a lot of information to take back to the workplace.

## The Next Generations

A growing concern among industry professionals is how to get younger people involved with their products, both as employees and consumers. The green industry is maturing, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract this demographic. Speaking with attendees on the show floor, it was evident that this was one of the main reasons many of them attended Short Course. They were seeking new ways to attract fresh, young faces to their businesses.

For those business owners seeking new ways to attract young consumers, many sessions focused specifically on this issue. They included “Is Your Business X-Rated?” by John Stanley, “Marketing To The Do-It-For-Me Consumer” by Yale Youngblood and “Consumer Trends and Container Gardening: How to Capture Boomers, Xers, Yers and Jonesers” by Judy Sharpton. These speakers discussed with attendees how younger generations want to set themselves apart from older generations.

During Short Course, various organizations take the opportunity to honor students, interns and young growers who have taken an active role in the industry. Many times, they are provided with an expense-paid trip to Columbus for the event. This is a chance for younger industry members to gain a better understanding of the industry as a whole, learn new skills and concepts and discover new products in the marketplace.

Aside from seminars and the show floor, young industry professionals were encouraged to attend “Unplugged,” a networking event organized by the Generation Next committee. This event debuted during last year’s show, and after such a successful turnout, OFA brought it back this year. Attendees dined, listened to live music and got to know other industry members. It was another successful year, and attendees

*Top:* Trade show displays were inspiring and engaging, such as this set up showing a pavilion tent, complete with a garden path merchandising colorful petunias and containers. *Middle:* A greenhouse indoors? Short Course trade show exhibitors really outdid themselves this year! *Bottom:* Novalis was recognized by OFA as a Destination Exhibitor, which is defined as a “must-see” attraction by show attendees.



were excited to network with other young professionals away from the sessions.

### Networking, Networking, Networking

One of the main reasons industry members attend Short Course each year is to network with other professionals in the business. The future of the industry depends on exchanges with peers, and attendees took full advantage of the networking opportunities offered this year during Short Course.

Growers were able to participate in the Grower Town Meeting, in which panelists initiated debate on topics concerning today's growers and offered constructive solutions. Questions were raised regarding marketing strategies, advertising problems and the challenges of fostering competition while creating grower networks. Panelists and participants discussed different ways growers

can satisfy customers' needs, and how to merchandise the many product offerings available.

It is always beneficial to find out what your peers are doing to better their businesses. You want to know what worked out and what didn't do so well. And this is exactly what happened at the Retailer Idea Exchange. The 170+ participants were divided into groups of about 10 people per table. Participants shared strategies to attract consumers and ideas to make these strategies even more successful. ▶

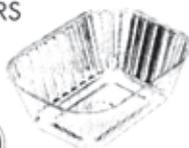
*Top: "Unplugged" had another successful turnout in its second year; more than 150 young industry professionals attended the event Monday night. Bottom: Alina Lovelace, shown here with Jeff Warschauer of Nexus Greenhouse Systems, (left) and GPN's Tim Hodson (right) is the winner of the 2006 GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year Scholarship.*



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# from the road

## Sustainability Is In

Sustainability is a hot topic for the green industry, and many manufacturing companies are choosing to be proactive in various ways. One of the most popular products on the trade show floor was the Ellepot, which is a biodegradable sleeve used for propagation

of cuttings and seeds. It can be produced with many types of growing media, such as peat, perlite, pine bark, vermiculite, etc.

Another interesting product we learned about at Short Course was AgriCoiir, a soil-less media that is 100-percent biodegradable. Processed in Mexico, it is derived from pure coconut husks.

## Displays Galore!

When it comes to exhibitor booths, some companies stepped it up to get attendees' attention. Many displays were larger than life, while some companies went above and beyond to get the attendees involved with their products.

If you were at Short Course this year, there is no way you would have been able to miss the Novalis display. Prior to the event, Novalis was recognized by OFA as a Destination Exhibitor, which is defined as a "must-see" attraction for show attendees. Novalis did not disappoint; it had set up a luxurious beach house complete with a deluxe kitchen area inside and a vivid display of flowers and foliage surrounding the house itself. Attendees were able to walk in and around the house to view the product offerings or capture attention-grabbing display ideas.

Other extravagant displays included those from all the greenhouse structure manufacturers. Several of the companies actually built miniature greenhouses to fit inside the convention center. The products and displays are becoming more innovative and spectacular each year.

## See You Next Year...

The 2008 OFA Short Course is scheduled to take place July 12-15 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. Remember, it's never too early to start making plans for the show! For additional information, visit [www.ofa.org](http://www.ofa.org). **GPN**

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